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SUBJECT: ANGOLA: SAMAKUVA RE-ELECTED FOR UNITA PARTY  
PRESIDENT

REF: LUANDA 0651

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Incumbent UNITA President Isaias Samakuva trounced rival Abel Chivukuvuku in the party elections held on July 19. In an electoral process designed to position UNITA as the only party prepared to bring transparency and democracy to Angola, the 1,076 delegates to UNITA's 10th Party Congress voted by an overwhelming margin to re-elect incumbent party president Isaias Samakuva for a second four year term. Though the race was labeled too close to call at the outset, internal political maneuvering by the incumbent Samakuva's campaign ensured his victory before the Congress' opening session. The results notwithstanding, it's too early to discount the younger and more charismatic Chivukuvuku from moving into the party leadership at a later date. End summary.

Why Samukuva?

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¶2. (SBU) In an unexpected landslide, Isaias Samakuva was re-elected to a second term as UNITA party president. Samakuva defeated rival Abel Chivukuvuku with 73.4 percent of the votes in elections held on July 19, 2007, during UNITA's 10th Party Congress. The young, urbane and charismatic Chivukuvuku seemed the stronger candidate when the campaign started, but in the end didn't resonate with delegates. Insiders pointed out that many delegates were "old-school UNITA" members who were older, rural, and often not well-educated. This group remains resistant to change and fiercely loyal to Savimbi's memory; Samakuva is seen as peacefully carrying Savimbi's legacy, whereas Chivukuvuku has been known to criticize the party founder's actions. The political machine that Samakuva has built over the last four years also came into play, as provincial delegates were selected through local administrators that owe their jobs - and loyalty - to Samakuva. Though publicly saying the race was still neck and neck, insiders told Poloff at the Congress' opening session that Chivukuvuku didn't stand a chance.

¶3. (SBU) In statements following the election, both candidates praised the clean campaign and the need to move forward as a united front as the party prepares for future legislative elections. Samakuva played to the need to prepare for legislative elections in his campaign; though Chivukuvuku is seen by many as a stronger presidential candidate due to his mass appeal, Samakuva has the grass-roots connections and organizational skills that the party needs for the fight to maintain or increase its seats in Parliament.

Positioning the Party

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¶4. (SBU) Political maneuvering aside, UNITA made a point of ensuring that both the campaign and electoral process were free and transparent in a bid to position themselves as the

party to bring democracy to Angola. The Congress and democratic angle resonated in the country's independent press outlets. Articles pointed out that UNITA is the only party to have regular Congresses and elected leaders, and election was hailed as a role model for the country to follow. State media outlets also carried news, updates, and highlights from the Congress, though clips from speeches were generally followed by an interview from a representative from the ruling MPLA, extolling the party and the government's work and progress.

15. (SBU) Comment: Chivukuvuku has every reason to take this defeat in stride. He is still seen as UNITA's heir apparent, and as a relatively young leader can bide his time. Party insiders do not rule out the possibility that given a poor showing by UNITA in the legislative elections an extraordinary congress could be called to elect him the party's presidential candidate. All the same, the surprisingly large margin of defeat is an indicator that the Luanda-based Chivukuvuku needs to build a rural base if he intends to win the party's leadership, rather than inherit it upon Samakuva's retirement or resignation. End comment.  
FERNANDEZ